

Local duo delivers petitions to Hastert

By EVAN LEHMANN, Reformer Washington Bureau
Brattleboro Reformer

Tuesday, May 2

WASHINGTON -- Three Windham County, Vermont, impeachment resolutions passed this spring were hand-delivered to the office of House Speaker Dennis Hastert on Monday.

Windham County supporters hope the delivery will ignite a national grassroots movement to hold President Bush accountable for allegedly misleading the public about the invasion of Iraq, unconstitutionally eavesdropping on Americans and endorsing torture as a national policy.

"Anybody can do this," said Ellen Tenney of Saxtons River, who delivered the documents from Newfane, Marlboro and Rockingham with Julia DeWalt. "That's what we have to do."

Seven town resolutions were passed in Vermont this spring. The state Democratic Party also passed a measure declaring that Bush "committed high crimes and misdemeanors" and asking Congress to "immediately begin impeachment proceedings." The measure was the fifth impeachment resolution passed in the country by a state Democratic Party.

Dan DeWalt, a Newfane Selectboard member and the first to offer the measure in Vermont, hopes the other Vermont resolutions will be delivered to Washington soon.

"We're just going to keep 'em going," said DeWalt, who's coordinating with national groups promoting impeachment.

"They can run and hide all they want to," he added of Washington politicians, who he believes are shrinking from the impeachment effort. "But they're not going to be able to escape the fact that the people of America want accountability."

Democrats are powerless to investigate the president without help from Republicans, who control the oversight committees.

"The White House and the current Republican leadership have made clear that they will continue to collude in stonewalling real oversight to hold the administration accountable for its actions -- the same Republican leaders who have made clear that they will ignore these resolutions from Vermont," said Sen. Patrick Leahy, the senior Democrat on the Judiciary Committee.

Independent Sen. James Jeffords said impeachment proceedings would be premature without committee investigations to determine whether Bush broke the law.

"I do not think this approach is warranted at this time," Jeffords said of impeachment. "I voted against giving President Bush the authority to go to war and I continue to believe, now more than ever, that this war is wrong. However, the question on whether the president illegally exceeded his authority has yet to be fully answered, and more investigation is warranted."

Leahy said a month ago he is inclined to support censuring Bush -- a symbolic measure that wields no legal repercussions, but would nonetheless fracture his credibility.

He has also called Bush's domestic eavesdropping program "illegal" and said the Judiciary Committee should subpoena White House documents to determine whether Bush dismissed dissenting views from career lawyers at the Justice Department.

"We know the president broke the law -- we should find out why," Leahy said during a committee hearing in

March.

Rep. Bernard Sanders, an independent running for Jeffords' Senate seat, cosponsored legislation calling for a select committee to investigate claims that Bush broke the law. After finishing the inquiry, the panel would recommend if Bush should be impeached.

The measure, introduced in December by Michigan Rep. John Conyers, the senior Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, has stalled.

Jim Barnett, chairman of the Vermont Republican Party, said the local impeachment effort is fueled not by evidence of wrongdoing but "partisan hatred for the president."

"They're proposing to impeach the president for doing everything in his constitutional authority to protect the American people from a terrorist attack," he added.

Tenney and Julia DeWalt, Dan DeWalt's daughter and student at American University, delivered the resolutions to a "straight-faced" aide in the office of Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., Tenney said.

The cameramen from an impeachment Web site, impeachpac.org, who accompanied them were surrounded by Capitol Police and made to shut down their cameras, Tenney said.

Tenney also expressed frustration that the delivery didn't generate a bigger media buzz.

"I truly believe the support is out there from the regular folk," she said.